

Exhibit A

When Time Itself Breaks You Down

By Daniel Egipciaco, as told to Christie Smythe

Drugs, violence, segregation and sexual assault are all part of prison life, but doing time in the federal system is more of a mental battle than a physical one. Sentences are longer in the federal system, and because there is no parole you spend more time behind bars than in state prisons. So the time itself can break you down.

At the age of 25, I was incarcerated for an imaginary offense. Agents caught me in a sting, and alleged I was helping to rob drug dealers. It was a ruse, though. There weren't even any drugs to steal. I was convicted at trial and sentenced to a mandatory minimum of 25 years. I've been in prison for 13 years so far, and if I don't win a reprieve from the court, I'll be here for almost another decade.

For the first eight months before my trial, I was held in the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn, in what was called the "Old Building," consisting of 100+ man open dormitories, twin-sized bunk beds, and five toilets and five showers (strategically placed no more than five feet from "common area" tables where inmates eat and socialize). There were two washers, two dryers, three TV's and four phones (the use of which was racially segregated), and one indoor "rec yard" the size of a large living room. I shared accommodations with a mixture of every race, gang and borough in New York City, with a splash of out-of-towners. The tension was thick, food horrible, and filth inescapable.

During my three-week trial, I was transferred to the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Manhattan where I was housed in solitary confinement, which felt like a strategic ploy to break my spirit. The trial process in the federal system is a nerve-wracking one, especially for someone as young as 25. I was told by my lawyers that entrapment was an impossible defense, and that the "FEDS can indict a ham sandwich."

Being dragged into court every morning, shackled from waist to ankles, seeing the heart-broken expressions on your family's faces, not knowing anything about the legal tactics being used to ultimately bury you, to then be taken back to solitary, only to repeat the same process again the next day can place you in a very dark place mentally. They let me out of solitary, and sent me back to the MDC in Brooklyn to await sentencing immediately after I was convicted.

I didn't get sentenced till more than a year after trial. Though it seemed like the longest year I lived yet, it gave me time to absorb the devastation of losing, which left me numb, and prepare myself mentally for the next hardship I was about to experience.

By this time I had studied up a bit in the law library and realized that the judge's hands were tied because of mandatory minimums. I knew I was about to be sentenced to no less than 25 years. Life felt as if it was over, while my incarceration was only just beginning.

After being sentenced, I was shipped off to my first real prison. F.C.I Otisville is a Medium-High security prison located atop a mountain in nearby upstate N.Y. Surprisingly enough, the layout appeared like a college campus. But what goes on behind them fences, inside them cell blocks, is far from what any parent would want their child to experience.

I spent 6.5 years there in the same 6x9-foot, two man cell and lived through race riots, gang wars, hunger strikes and lock-downs. One winter there was no hot water, just cold showers. From there I came to F.C.I Fort Dix, a low security prison on an army base in New Jersey.

The monotony of prison life can have a serious affect on your brain. Every day is more or less repetitive, and if you don't create a routine for yourself the days become long and dull. You start to get caught up on the politics and small daily miseries. You focus less on preparing for your inevitable release and more on just day to day survival.

You hear about guys who spend so much time incarcerated that they take their "jail habits" home, like wearing showers shoes in the shower to avoid foot fungus, and carrying a spray bottle to the toilet to disinfect it from God knows what. Their internal clocks automatically wake them for "count time" hours – 12 am, 3 am, 5 am for regular counts and 4 pm and 10 pm for stand-up counts.

I've avoided the feeling of institutionalization for the most part thus far by keeping my priorities in order as much as I can. I focus on bettering myself mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally so that upon my release I will leave a better person than I came in. My daily routine consist of working out, eating properly, reading AND studying my craft, maintaining strong communication with my loved ones, corresponding with my legal team to keep fighting for my freedom, taking what few programs are available that have potential to help my transition back to society an easier one, and maintaining my faith.

There comes a point during incarceration that a transition becomes necessary (though some never make it). To sit back and dwell on the amount of time you received, how bad the conditions are, how much you miss your freedom, who turned their back on you, etc., will only fill you with misery and resentment, and make your days a living hell. But once you accept the worse case scenario, and accept responsibility for the actions you took to be where you are, then you can begin to make that transition.

For me that transition began during my first year in prison after being sentenced. I knew deep down inside that I didn't deserve the time I got, but figured God must have a bigger plan for me and this here must be the turning point. I accepted the worse case scenario being that I was going to have to do every day of the 25 years I was sentenced to, but was determined to fight everyday to regain my freedom and prepare myself in the meantime for my inevitable release.

I became proactive in my legal battle by studying law and researching cases, because no one knows your case better than you and no one is going to fight for your freedom harder than you. I also signed up for the only program at the time that made sense to me, Young Men Incorporated, a Leadership Training Academy, designed to educate, motivate, and cultivate "at risk" youth. That was the game changer for me. I worked my way up the ranks to become president of this Inmate Organization, and now facilitate classes, train others to help facilitate, and mentor members.

Now of course, there are setbacks, sometimes more than you feel you can handle. Every time an appeal for your sentence to be overturned is denied you feel like quitting. Every time someone you love loses communication, forgets to put money on your books, misses a visit, or stops being supportive you feel more and more lonely. God forbid you lose a loved one while you're incarcerated. That sense of helplessness and guilt for not being there can eat you up.

The struggle is real, and the odds are stacked against you. But out of the wreck you shall rise. You have to pick yourself back up every time and keep fighting, stay focused and determined, and know that it can always be worse. I've been fortunate to have a loving and supportive family holding me down through my incarceration, and have made some life long friendships with individuals on the inside. So there's lessons to be learned in every trial and tribulation, and a blessing in every experience and struggle.